

John 1:1-18 – The Nativity of Our Lord – The Icon of His Grace – December 25, 2025

+In Nomine Iesu+

You have probably figured out by now that I want us to sing as a congregation—and maybe especially at Christmas. I have been hinting at this for the last few weeks. And we sing because the hymns are just plain amazing—musically and theologically.

It is one of the most repeated commands in Scripture. Not because we are supposed to be good singers. Most of us are not. And that is okay—even as we appreciate those who are. Instead, we sing to ground us in good theology.

And this means we need to be very careful with what we sing in the Church. This should include weddings and funerals by the way—but especially at Christmas. Every one of our hymns has stood the test of time. Every one of our hymns proclaims Christ to us. They preach. They proclaim. They comfort. They put the Word of God on our own lips. And in this way, we give careful attention to the faith. In our tradition, this is not an optional practice.

Now, we can never fit all of the great hymns of Christmas in one service. It is good that Christmas is a season. We anticipate in Advent. We have multiple services on Christmas Eve. And Christmas continues for 12 Days. Even Epiphany is technically in the Time of Christmas.

Last night we sang the hymn, *O Come All Ye Faithful*. We will sing it again this coming Sunday. Now admittedly, this is an emotional hymn. On Christmas Eve and Christmas Day we want to feel cozy and warm—as gentle snowflakes fall—with visions of sugar plums dance in our heads. Although, I am not sure I want to have a vision of a dancing fruit. Sounds like too much eggnog.

But this hymn doesn't do for us what *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* does, for example. It doesn't really accomplish this emotional goal. Not, at least, if we are listening. Admittedly, the tune is comfortable and warm. But the words contain some intense theology.

And since we aren't singing it today, let me invite you to grab a hymnal and look at this one. *O Come All Ye Faithful* is hymn number 379. There are distinct advantages of looking at a hymn in the hymnal. You get to see things like authors and translators. You get to see the Bible text on which a hymn is based. You engage the text with your eyes. And here, we even get a Spanish translation.

We find some serious theology here. The first verse serves as a call to worship—an invocation of sorts—as we sing, “O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant.” This is for those who—like the shepherds of old—hear the angelic proclamation. The author invites us to Bethlehem at Christmas. And He calls us to behold the Christ. Come and see. Come and worship. And find true joy here.

But in the second verse—that none of us really remember—John Wade speaks with the language of St. John the Theologian from our Gospel reading—along with the Prophet Isaiah and St. Luke, “Highest, most holy, Light of Light eternal, Born of a Virgin, a mortal He comes; Son of the Father now in flesh appearing.”

And we quickly realize, this isn't merely sentimental. Christmas isn't about dancing fairies and desserts made of prunes. And that's a very good thing. Instead, our thoughts are

filled with the Word of John's Gospel and the Nicene Creed. And you know this confession.

Jesus is the "only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary."

This is cosmic language—deeply theological—and even a little shocking. And they are the Gospel. With these words we are claiming that Jesus is God. And that God has become human. The true light of Christ has come into the world—into *our* world. And He has done all of this for us. In this holy nativity, the Son of God is born of the Blessed Virgin Mary and has taken on her flesh.

So why would someone think it is fitting to include content from the Nicene Creed in a Christmas hymn? Christmas is supposed to be quaint and sentimental. It is supposed to be kid-friendly. And yet the hymn writer plunges us into the depths of the very nature of God. He describes for us the incarnation.

The simple answer? This is what the Church believes about Jesus. This is what Christmas is all about. This is what we are here to celebrate. And it is what we need. "Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning... Word of the Father; Now in flesh appearing." God has done something spectacular.

Christmas is the opening move in the salvation of God's people as He becomes present in creation. And He comes to us. This is the way God works from the beginning. We don't cry out to Him for help. We often hide in our sin. We don't ascend Mount Sinai or Mount Zion into heaven to get His attention. We don't fix our problems ourselves. He comes down to us. He joins us under the curse of sin—to undo that curse for us. And we never expected this.

And here we encounter something of a problem. God certainly has not been completely absent prior to this point in human history. He appeared in a burning bush. He had spoken through the prophets. He had filled the temple in Jerusalem with His gracious and glorious—and sometimes even dangerous—presence. He delivered His grace through an elaborate system of sacrifices.

But now, John tells us, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." St. Paul says, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."

The incarnation, the enfleshment, was something unique and new. God was locating His presence not just nearby—but now actually in humanity. At the annunciation, the announcement of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, the location of God's presence shifted from the Temple—to her womb and—finally to a manger.

But if Jesus is God with us, and we can see His glory, shouldn't something terrible happen that first Christmas morning? Can we really see God and live? If God reveals His glory in the person of Jesus Christ, shouldn't that first Christmas have been something more like the terror of God's appearance at Mt. Sinai?

When God visits this sinful broken place, we expect thunder and lightning and earthquakes and fear. And really, shouldn't the world be torn apart as a holy God disrupts

the ways of sinful man? God could certainly explode on the scene. And we must say that He saw something of this at the Cross. Remember that there was an earthquake and darkness and the veil for the temple—a veil decorated with the stars and planets of the cosmos—tore in two from top to bottom. And we *will see* a lot more on the last day.

And St. John—in our Gospel reading—even begins with the pure awesomeness of Jesus. Jesus is the Word. All things were made through Him. In Him was life and light. And that light shines in the darkness—and the darkness is overcome. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God. And this Word became flesh, and yet somehow—strangely enough—the world hardly notices.

His coming is—as we talked about last night at the Children’s Service—is also with great humility. It is gentle and humble. Sheep and shepherds welcome Him to this world. Eventually kings will try and kill Him. But it isn’t until the Magi visit from the East that King Herod gets nervous. Right now, the powers of this world don’t care. Nobody cares—except for a small remnant who knew. Jesus seems to be yet another baby born in little tiny Bethlehem.

It all looks so ordinary. So simple. So routine. So human. Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped as St. Paul says. He set aside His dazzling glory. He was not ashamed of this lowliness. He was not ashamed of us—a manger—or a cross.

The hymns help us understand this better. In *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*—which we will sing during the reception of the Sacrament—and I won’t make you look this one up in your hymnal—we get a bit of an explanation. “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate deity! Pleased as Man with man to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel.” There is something to talk about around the table today. This is something to pass on from generation to generation. The hymns teach us to talk about Christ in this way.

This is God’s plan. It always was. He would come as one of us. He would take on human flesh from Mary. He would grow in wisdom and stature. He would be all that Israel could not be. He would remain faithful in the wilderness. He would clean up the temple. He would become the temple—complete the temple. He would teach the Word. He would bring about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus took on flesh to do all that we could not—all that we would not do. He would live a perfect, godly, holy life. The life of the Law written on our hearts. The Law of the Ten Commandments. He would fulfill it all. He would live the life God expected for His creatures.

But Jesus also took on flesh so that He could die. The Nativity is about the cross. God Himself can’t die. It is against His nature. God can’t suffer. And so, Jesus, true God, begotten of the Father before all eternity, took on a human nature with all of its limitations. God takes on everything human—body and soul, eyes and ears, reason and all our senses. And He pulls all of this into His divine nature.

But He does this so He can suffer for us. So He could die for us. So that He could pull all of our sin onto Himself and nail it to the cross. The Nativity happens because we need the cross. And if this Jesus isn’t human and divine, if God didn’t come in the flesh for us, then we are still in our sins. All that awaits us is judgment and condemnation. And there is no reason to celebrate today. Just take all those presents right back to the store.

This theology that John presents to us on Christmas Day—that our hymns so ably present—really matters—for this life—and for eternity.

It makes our minds spin a little when we talk about the natures of Jesus Christ. And we want to be pretty precise. But the language is all right here for us. Jesus is true God, coequal, coeternal with the Father. Jesus is the Creator through whom everything is made that has been made. And Jesus is true man, born of the Virgin Mary.

To say otherwise puts us outside of Christianity—and outside of the faith of the Historic Christian creeds—what the true Church at all times and in all places has confessed. And it leaves us lost and still in our sins.

And so, the Church confesses today. It confesses the Nicene Creed. It confesses the Holy Scriptures. It confesses Christ. And even our hymns at Christmas serve to confess this saving faith.

Our hymns are full of what we believe and of what we know to be true. Most of the stuff on the radio this Christmas time is merely sentimental. It evokes memories and feelings. Some of it is even drivel. But here we sing of the birth of our Savior. Here we sing the Good News.

Here we celebrate Jesus, who comes from heaven to earth for us. Who comes to us still in Bread and Wine. Who will come again and take us to be with Himself. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This is our gift this Christmas. And it is all we need. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+